



S. Farram

Revolution, religion and magic; The PKI in West Timor, 1924-1966

In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 158 (2002), no: 1, Leiden, 21-48

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

STEVEN FARRAM

Revolution, Religion and Magic The PKI in West Timor, 1924-1966

Introduction

The Indonesian Communist Party began as a socialist organization in Java in 1914 and after various permutations took on the name Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) in 1924. Outside the Russian sphere, it was the first communist party in Asia. Most studies of the PKI stress its activities in Java, and to a lesser extent Bali and Sumatra, while the other islands have been largely ignored.¹ An examination of the history of the PKI in the Timor region, however, reveals that the party was adept at adapting to local conditions. The area is predominantly Christian, but traditional animism and belief in the powers of the supernatural have remained strong also. The PKI in West Timor showed from its earliest days up until the point when the party was dissolved that it was capable of mixing radical politics, Christianity, traditional magic, and witchcraft into a blend that was palatable to the variety of local tastes.² The PKI was no latecomer to the region either, for in the very year the party was formed, Dutch officials in Timor reported communist activity in their area. Throughout the Dutch period there was regular mention of communists undermining *rust en orde* (peace and order) in West Timor and the surrounding islands. Under the Indonesian administration the PKI blossomed in West Timor. By the mid-1960s there were PKI members in the

¹ The major exception is Webb 1986. For detailed information about the history of the PKI otherwise, see McVey 1968. The rise and fall of the PKI is covered also in a number of general histories of Indonesia, such as Ricklefs 1990 and Legge 1977.

² The mixture of politics with mainstream religions and/or traditional beliefs is not unique to Timor. Popular protest movements which have combined these elements have been noted elsewhere in Indonesia, the Philippines, parts of Europe, and elsewhere. Because of preconceived ideas of what constitutes a 'political movement', these movements have often been ignored or misunderstood. They deserve far greater attention. For more information, see Kartodirdjo 1978; Ileo 1989; and Hobsbawm 1965.

STEVEN FARRAM, a PhD candidate and part-time lecturer at the Northern Territory University, holds Bachelor of Arts and Economics degrees from that university and the University of Sydney respectively. Specializing in the history of West Timor, he has previously published 'The Dutch Conquest of Bali; The Conspiracy Theory Revisited', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 26 (1998):207-23, and 'The two Timors; The Partitioning of Timor by the Portuguese and the Dutch', *Studies in the Languages and Cultures of East Timor* 2 (1999):38-55. The author may be contacted at the Faculty of Law, Business and Arts, Northern Territory University, Darwin, NT 0909, Australia.

local parliament, in high positions in government departments, and in the army. They were even active in the Church. The PKI in West Timor was at its zenith, but on 17 January 1966 ten thousand people reportedly gathered in Kupang, the major city in West Timor, to demand that it be disbanded. Apparently it had already 'voluntarily' dissolved itself six days earlier (El Tari 1972:287). Thus the PKI officially ceased to exist in West Timor, and after the party was banned in mid-1966, the three letters PKI were rarely heard there in public again.

The ban, which is still in effect today, came in the aftermath of the so-called communist coup attempt in Jakarta of 30 September - 1 October 1965, whereby six of Indonesia's top army generals were killed. The role of the PKI in those events is still being debated. It has been suggested that the 'coup' was engineered by General Soeharto, who took over as president from Soekarno soon afterwards, and that it had little to do with the PKI at all. The CIA has been implicated also.³ The real truth may ultimately prove impossible to find, but it is not denied that following the 'coup' hundreds of thousands of PKI members, supporters and suspected sympathizers were slaughtered across the archipelago, including Timor.⁴ In the meantime, the PKI was demonized by the Soeharto regime, and it was common practice for its opponents to be branded 'communists'. Only since Soeharto's downfall have many Indonesians been willing to talk about the PKI, though for many others it remains a taboo subject.⁵

Early communist activity in West Timor: Christian Pandy and the Sarekat Rajat

History is written by the victor, and the achievements of the members and associates of the PKI were systematically erased from the official histories by the Soeharto regime. This included not only those who were implicated in the 1965 'coup', but many PKI figures who had been active in the Indonesian independence movement at a much earlier stage.⁶ Considering this, it is curious that Christian Pandy, a PKI member and activist in Kupang in the 1920s,

³ For a discussion of some of the competing theories, see McDonald 1981:43-7. Legge 1977:165 gives a good sample of literature relating to the 'coup'. For US involvement, see Scott 1985.

⁴ There are no precise figures for the number of people killed, but there is a consensus that 500,000-1,000,000 is not an unlikely figure, while it might even be much higher. For a list of various estimates, see Cribb 1990:12.

⁵ For this reason the names of some of my informants have been withheld.

⁶ Thus names and photographs of people like Air Force Commander Omar Dani were removed from the military history books, and communist nationalists such as Tan Malaka were never acknowledged by the Soeharto regime. See 'Pembelaan Sekaligus Penyesalan Omar Dani', *Kompas*, 1 February 2001; and 'Peranan Tan Malaka Perlu Diluruskan', *Kompas*, 13 March 2000.

in nearly all Indonesian histories of the Timor region is recognized for his contribution as a nationalist and at the same time acknowledged as a communist.⁷ There is even a cross erected in his memory in the official Taman Makam Pahlawan (Heroes' Cemetery) in Kupang.⁸ Pandy must be one of the few acknowledged communists to have been so honoured in Indonesia.

Most information concerning Pandy and his contemporaries comes from reports written by Dutch officials, who clearly viewed 'left-oriented' activists with disdain. These reports also reveal that the officials considered traditional animist religion and belief in supernatural powers to be inferior to their own Christian beliefs. Where political activity could be linked to traditional beliefs, it is often presented in such a way in the Dutch reports as to make it obvious that the officials felt that neither deserved to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, as long as the possible prejudices of their writers are kept in mind, these reports constitute an invaluable and under-utilized source of information.

Christian Pandy is mentioned in a 1924 report by the Resident C. Schultz (see Schultz 1925), where it is noted that there had been little political activity in the Residency of Timor and Dependencies before that year, but that this had changed with the arrival of a number of activists from outside the area. One of these was Pandy. Schultz noted that Pandy was originally from the nearby island of Rote, but had come from Makassar, where he worked as a '*prokrol bamboe*' (para-professional lawyer).⁹ He had also been to Batavia (Jakarta) and had joined the PKI while in Java. He came to Kupang with another Rotenese, J.W. Toepoe, and together they established an organization called Kerapatan Timor Evolutie (Gathering of Timor's Evolution), through which they aimed to 'look after the interests of their brothers in the Timor archipelago'. The organization failed, in Schultz's view, because as soon as Pandy was pointed out as a communist, people were afraid to be associated with him.

Pandy and Toepoe parted company, whereupon Pandy set up the Sarekat Timor (Timor League). He claimed that the new organization was to be based on socialist principles and would aim at 'a free man and a free state'. His speech at the following meeting of the new organization is described in Schultz's report as being 'highly communist-tinged'. It was estimated that Pandy had attracted about forty members, 'chiefly malcontents and undesirable elements', according to Schultz.

At the end of 1925 Schultz reported that Pandy had changed the name of

⁷ For example, *Sejarah* 1979:45; Doko 1975:66; Widiyatmika, Sukendro, and Suroto 1978:58.

⁸ As I verified on a personal visit in October 2000.

⁹ *Prokrol bamboe* appear to have been unpopular with Dutch officials. Although without formal legal training, they were, and are, often very effective. For more information, see Lev 1973.

his organization to Sarekat Rajat (People's League) and that membership had swelled to 1200. He was publishing a newspaper, *Api* (Fire), which carried articles complaining about the behaviour of various local rajas. Schultz reported that Pandy's complaints about Raja Molo's 'abominable behaviour [...] with women' were 'old and true'; but that nothing was to be done about it. The complaints about the 'misbehaviour' of Raja Amarasi, Alexander Koroh, were also said to be justified; it was apparently so bad (the details are not revealed in the reports) that it was concluded that he should be removed, but that this should be postponed for some time in order that the Raja's removal and Pandy's campaign against him would not be linked in people's minds. This was, in fact, done, but Schultz admitted that Pandy's ability to take bold action against the government and the rajas, apparently with impunity, had already impressed the people.¹⁰

Pandy built up interest in his organization by promising the abolition of taxes and corvée labour. In April 1925 he publicly incited the people of Kampong Solor, a Muslim area of Kupang, to refuse to do corvée labour. Twelve people responded to his call and as a result Pandy was convicted and sentenced to two days' detention. Soon after that, Pandy and some followers went to nearby Semaui Island and held a number of public meetings, 'where he proclaimed his communist ideas' and incited the people to refuse to perform corvée labour or pay taxes. Pandy must have been an effective speaker; he was said to enthral his audience. At any rate, he was able to enlist 500 new members for the Sarekat Rajat during his visit to Semaui (Schultz 1926 and 1927).

Returning to Kupang, Pandy revisited Kampong Solor and again incited the people to refuse to do corvée labour, and this time was given a three-month sentence. Pandy's message had already got through, however, and no fewer than seventy-three people refused to do corvée labour on Semaui during the month of July while he was in detention. They were punished with three days' detention. One month later the same people were sentenced to three months' detention as repeat offenders. Shortly after that another forty unwilling workers from Funai were given the same punishment. While Pandy was in detention, the leadership was taken over by Mathias MaE, Tae Amtiran, and Selkioma, who did their best to fan the flames of resistance. Despite the gaolings, morale appears to have been high and all concerned were looking forward to 24 August, the day the term of Pandy's imprison-

¹⁰ Schultz 1926; C. Schultz, Letter to the Governor-General, 'No. 243/Geheim. Onderwerp: Klachten tegen den Radja van Molo', 9 December 1925; and Hillen, Letter to the Governor-General, 'No. Bg.x5/1/7. Zeer Geheim. Onderwerp: Ontheffing van den Zelfbestuurder van Amarassi, Alexander Koroh, van zyn waardigheid wegens wangedrag', 15 July 1925; both in *Politieke Verslagen*.

ment expired. In the meantime, however, the authorities had been collecting evidence in relation to the previous meetings held on Semau, and instead of Pandey coming out of gaol, MaE went in. The final result was that Pandey was sentenced to a further three years' imprisonment for sedition, and MaE to two years. A certain Liskodat was convicted also. These convictions appear to have been the death blow for Pandey's movement, and the day after his sentencing, 120 *corvée* labourers on Semau who only the day before had refused to work, obediently reported to carry out their duties (Schultz 1926 and 1927).

After Pandey and MaE were sent to serve their sentences in Cipinang Prison in Batavia, little more was heard of the Sarekat Rajat in Timor. Sarekat Rajat had, however, attracted some interest from the island of Adonara, and some of Raja Lamahala's retinue became members during his visit to Kupang in July 1925. Not long afterwards a communist soldier, Soeradi, was stationed on the island and held secret meetings, whereby the organization's membership increased to 140. Soeradi left Adonara in November and was dismissed from the army shortly afterwards because of his communist inclinations. The Lamahala branch of the Sarekat Rajat managed to hang on, however, and even had members on other nearby islands. All the rajas of the Timor area were strongly opposed to the Sarekat Rajat, but Raja Lamahala's son had attended Soeradi's meetings and the Raja himself, Ismael Adie, had registered as a member under the fictitious name of Joesoef bin Daoed. When this was discovered, 'naturally, he was immediately removed from his function', wrote Resident Schultz (Schultz 1926 and 1927).

The Adonara branch of the Sarekat Rajat lasted until 1927, but in that year its putative leader, Achmad Chatib gelar Hadji Datoek Batoeah, an Acehnese exiled in Kalabahi on nearby Alor, was removed to the notorious internment camp of Boven Digul in Dutch New Guinea. The main reason given for this was his 'communist leanings'. A fellow Acehnese exile, Natar Zainoedin, also a communist, had been interned at Kefamenanu in Central Timor, but in 1927 was sent with Batoeah to Boven Digul, as a house search revealed that he had been carrying out 'secret propaganda for his dogma' (Schultz 1927).

Batoeah, Zainoedin, Soeradi, and others, may have been genuine communists, but Resident Schultz commented that many of the people 'associated with Sarekat Rajat called themselves communist without there being any sign of communism or understanding of the term' (Schultz 1927). Some of those associated with Sarekat Rajat were not even aware that they had joined the organization, as was revealed in the case of Marcus Amtiran, who began a new action in the Amarasi region in south-western Timor in January 1926.

Amtiran and some helpers began by spreading rumours about a disease that would devastate Amarasi and about a communist warship which would land on the coast, whose soldiers would massacre the people. Amtiran then told the people that they could safeguard themselves against these calamities

by buying a card from him at the price of f 0.55, which he would show them how to use as a talisman. The matter was handled with great secrecy, and those who wanted to participate in the scheme had to use a secret password. The cards they were sold were membership cards of the Sarekat Rajat.

The matter did not remain secret for long. By late January most of the cards had been handed in to the government authorities and Marcus Amtiran was held for questioning. About 400 cards had been sold, but those who had bought them reportedly had not had the faintest notion that they were joining an organization and had regarded the cards purely as amulets to avert the coming disasters. Amtiran was sentenced to two and a half years gaol for fraud.¹¹

The later activities of Christian Pandy

When Pandy returned to Kupang in 1928 he declared that he would eschew political movements. He found an alternative outlet in religion and was registered in the early 1930s as chairman of a new organization, the Bentara Masehi (Christian Herald). Its stated aims were to teach people the Christian religion and attempt its application in daily life. Pandy was also editor of the organization's newspaper, *Sedar* (Aware).¹² In 1934 Pandy and about fifty supporters split from the Protestant Church and set up their own church.¹³ Pandy enlisted new members wherever he could, which led to much conflict. Popular feeling against him grew so strong that many of his followers left him and he abandoned this sect that had separated from the established Church. Pandy remained restless, however, and he again started organizing religious meetings and building up a following with a new group called Masehi Timor (Timor Christians). The subjects of the group's meetings did not seem to stray onto political terrain, but Pandy's communist past made him highly suspect and he was kept under close scrutiny.¹⁴

¹¹ C. Schultz, 'Politiek overzicht over het eerste halfjaar 1926 van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden', in *Politieke Verslagen*. Politics and magic often seem to have been combined in Indonesia. The membership cards for the Sarekat Islam, established in Java in 1911, were sometimes also used as amulets. See Ricklefs 1990:158.

¹² Gewestelijk Secretaris Schumacher, 'Politiek overzicht over het jaar 1928 van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden'; 'Te Koepang verschijnende periodieken'; and 'Opgave van de verenigingen te Koepang'; all in *Politieke Verslagen*.

¹³ The main Protestant Church in Timor at the time was the state-sponsored Indische Kerk, or Indies Church. Only after World War II were Protestants in Timor able to establish their own independent church: the Gereja Masehi Injili Timor (Timor Evangelical Christian Church, GMIT).

¹⁴ J.J. Bosch, 'Politiek verslag van Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het jaar 1934', in *Politieke Verslagen*; and Bosch 1935.

After this episode Pandy kept himself out of the spotlight, and his name is absent from the Resident's reports for the remaining period before World War II. In November 1946, however, one Ch. Pandy was listed as being vice-chairman of a new workers' union in Kupang, the Serikat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia (Indonesian Labour Union, SKBI), which was connected with the most 'progressive' of the new political groups in Timor, the Persatoean Demokrasi Indonesia (Indonesian Democratic Union, PDI). The SKBI was instrumental in having a representative from the PDI sent to the SOBSI (Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia: All-Indonesia Central Labour Organization, a trade union federation with a strong communist representation) congress in Java the following year. Members of the more conservative political groups in Kupang were said to have personal grievances against Pandy of the SKBI. It seems likely that this was the same Pandy who caused such a stir back in 1925. If so, this was his swan song, as the name Pandy does not appear in any further reports.¹⁵

Another 'prokrol bamboe communist': Frans Djami

Nearly all the communists mentioned in the early West Timor reports were associated with the Sarekat Rajat. One communist who was not explicitly linked to Pandy's group was Frans Djami, but it is possible that he was also a member. There are otherwise many parallels between the careers of Djami and Pandy and the development of the Sarekat Rajat.

Frans Djami was from Sabu Island, but in 1925 he was employed as a teacher on Alor. In the same year he was transferred to South Sulawesi for promoting communism. In October 1926 he was finally dismissed for the same reason. In 1931 he became active in the nationalist organization, Timorsch Verbond (Timorese Alliance), on Rote and in 1933 he was associated with the same organization in Surabaya. The Timorsch Verbond was considered radical by some members of the government, but was actually fairly conservative, seeking reforms rather than revolution and being generally co-operative with the government. At any rate, Djami's 'extreme fanaticism' was too much for his fellow members and he was expelled (Bosch 1935).

Djami then moved to Sumba and started working as a *prokrol bamboe*. The

¹⁵ 'Politiek verslag van den Resident van Timor en Onderhoorigheden over de eerste helft van November 1946' [name author not known; apparently written by the Residentie Secretaris on behalf of C.W. Schuller]; and C.W. Schuller, 'Politiek verslag van den Resident van Timor en Onderhoorigheden over de maand Augustus 1947'; both in Algemene Secretarie Archief No. 3259, 'Politieke en economische verslagen betreffende de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden, uitgebracht door de Resident in Kupang; 1946 okt-1947 dec', Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, hereafter referred to as ARA, Algemene Secretarie No. 3259.

government suspected that during his stay there, Djami secretly incited the local Sabunese people to refuse to pay taxes or do corvée labour. He was also suspected of selling amulets – another example of the curious blend of radical politics and traditional magic which is such a recurring theme in the Timor region during the period of this study (Bosch 1935).

In 1934 Djami moved to Kupang and was soon shown to be involved in maintaining communist connections. This was as a result of uncensored letters being found in the possession of a communist prisoner at Boven Digul. The letters had come from his brother, Willa Koiij, who lived in Kupang, and were said to have been written for him by Frans Djami (Bosch 1935).

In early 1935 Frans Djami set up a newspaper, *Tjinta Kebenaran* (Devotion to Truth), in Kupang and was soon fined for publishing libellous articles. Many of his articles were considered insulting to the government and local rajas and bordering on the seditious. Resident J.J. Bosch kept Djami under close observation and awaited a chance to take stronger action. This chance came in late 1937, when Djami was gaoled for three months for press offences.¹⁶ Djami began publishing again in 1938 but soon gave up, apparently because of lack of interest.¹⁷

Frans Djami thereupon disappeared from the official reports, but made a lasting impression during the Japanese occupation, although in strange circumstances. As mentioned, he had been a member of the Timorsch Verbond, whose greatest rival had been the Perserikatan Timor (Timor Union), led by Christian Frans. The Perserikatan Timor was regarded as 'loyal' pro-Dutch. Nevertheless, Christian Frans became an important figure in the Japanese government service in Timor. Djami, who was suspicious of Frans, joined forces with the Otori, a Japanese secret intelligence group, which suspected that Frans might be a Dutch agent. One night in September 1943 they kidnapped Frans and took him out in a boat to Kupang Bay, where he was questioned. Finally, Frans was bayoneted and his body weighted and thrown into the harbour. The Japanese authorities unsuccessfully searched for Frans for ten days, until some naval police became suspicious of an Otori boat preparing to leave for Ambon. On board they found, among others, Frans Djami. Under torture Djami told the whole story, but his ordeal had been so great that he only got the story out with his dying breath. Because they became victims of the Japanese, both Frans Djami, the communist nationalist, and

¹⁶ J.J. Bosch, 'Politiek verslag van Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het jaar 1935', 'Politiek verslag van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het jaar 1936', and 'Politiek verslag van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het eerste halfjaar 1937'; and Gewestelijk Secretaris Verheul, 'Politiek verslag van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het jaar 1937'; all in *Politieke Verslagen*.

¹⁷ F.J. Nieboer, 'Politiek verslag van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het jaar 1938', in *Politieke Verslagen*.

Christian Frans, the man he helped to kill, are now remembered as martyrs to the nationalist cause (*Republik* 1953:219; *Doko* 1975:75-7).

Post-World War II communist upsurge: exported from Australia?

Following the dissolution of the Sarekat Rajat, the Dutch authorities in West Timor were bothered by little further communist activity in the years leading up to World War II. One of the few mentions of communists in this period was in a report about a movement organized by the Kuomintang deputy from Dili, in neighbouring Portuguese Timor, for the purpose of taking action against communist-inclined Chinese living in the West Timorese town of Atambua. What the nature of this action was is not revealed, but the tone of the report suggests that the Dutch Resident was not too concerned about it. Perhaps he was complacent because the movement seemed to involve only Chinese and was *anti-communist*.¹⁸ Following the war, however, the Dutch were apprehensive about increased communist influence and thought that it might be being imported into Timor from Australia.

During World War II the Dutch had formed a Netherlands Indies government-in-exile in Australia. They were shocked when after the war their plans to re-occupy their colony began to fall apart as the result of a campaign begun by Australian trade unions. Black bans were placed on Dutch shipping, supplies were left stranded on wharves, and Indonesians in Australia who identified with the Republic were given all kinds of assistance.¹⁹ The Dutch were incensed by this behaviour and were highly suspicious of the Australians who formed part of the post-war occupation force in Indonesia. In April 1946 the Dutch Cabinet was informed that intensive communist propaganda from Australia was being carried into parts of Indonesia, including Timor. Allegedly members of the Australian army were involved and brochures and other kinds of printed material were being brought in on Australian planes. Similar claims were made in 1947.²⁰

There may have been some truth in these allegations, but the strongest communist agitation imported into Indonesia from Australia was probably that brought in by existing PKI members. These people had come to be in Australia as a result of the Dutch evacuated from Indonesia at the beginning

¹⁸ P.F.J. Karthaus, 'Politiek overzicht over het eerste halfjaar 1930 van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden', in *Politieke Verslagen*.

¹⁹ For a comprehensive account of this episode, see Lockwood 1975.

²⁰ 'Secretaris van de Ministerraad (Sanders) aan alle de leden van de Ministerraad, 10 april 1946', in Van der Wal 1974:84; 'Tijdelijk zaakgelastigde te Canberra (De Ranitz) aan minister van buitenlandse zaken (Van Boetzelaer van Oosterhout), 30 juni 1947', in Van der Wal, Drooglever, and Schouten 1981:544.

of the war bringing 'dangerous' political prisoners, including PKI members held in Boven Digul, with them. After at first being re-interred in Australia, these people were released into the general community following a campaign by trade unionists and others. While in Australia, many of the former prisoners established contact with the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). They included important figures like Harjono, who presided over the first SOBSI congress in 1946, and Sardjono, a long-standing PKI chairman (Lockwood 1975:28, 141).

The Indonesians in Australia supported the Allied war effort and co-operated with the Dutch authorities, but when the news came through that the Japanese had surrendered and independence had been declared in Indonesia, many Indonesians no longer wanted to serve the Dutch. Indonesian seamen went on strike and sought assistance from their Australian colleagues. As a result a general boycott was declared on Dutch shipping to Indonesia and an effort was made to stop any assistance being given to the anti-Republican forces. These measures were strongly supported by the CPA and communist-controlled trade unions, but also by the great majority of non-communist Australians. The Australian government tried to remain neutral, but wanted to get rid of the striking seamen and other Indonesians stranded on Australian shores and chartered a vessel, the *Esperance Bay*, to return them to Indonesia. The Dutch authorities and Mountbatten of South East Asia Command (SEAC) were opposed to giving these 'revolutionaries' permission to land in Java or Sumatra, but they had been given a guarantee that they would be allowed to disembark in Republican territory. The Australian government eventually reached a compromise with its Dutch and British critics whereby nineteen of the most active leaders were put ashore in Timor. They included a number of Boven Digul men. The rest continued on to Java.²¹

It had been decided not to hand the Indonesians over to the Dutch authorities, so eighteen of them were removed to Semau Island, not far from Kupang, and provided for by the Australian army, while the nineteenth, accompanied by his wife and seven children, was kept in a house in Kupang with 'an Australian guard to protect him from the Dutch and to protect the Timorese from him'.²² Eventually in March 1946 the group was airlifted out of Kupang to begin a circuitous journey to Java via North Borneo and Singapore. By then their number had grown to thirty-two, as some of the men had acquired wives during their stay on Semau.²³

²¹ Lockwood 1975:92-3, 138-44; 'Mountbatten to Chifley, 20 October 1945', in Hudson and May 1989:521-2.

²² National Archives of Australia (hereafter referred to as NAA), MP742/1, 115/1/285.

²³ NAA, MP742/1, 115/1/285; NAA, A1838/278, 401/3/6/1/7.

Whether or not these 'extremely dangerous' 'expert agitators' managed to pass on any of their revolutionary communist ideas to the local Timorese population is unknown. In December 1948, however, one Nisi KoEn was arrested on Semaú for inciting the local people to ignore the orders of Raja Kupang and to refuse to send their children to school or pay taxes. It was reported that 'Nisi KoEn has been to Australia, and the fact that there is a communist strain in his propaganda is not surprising'.²⁴

Other post-World War II communist activities in the Timor region

Just three months before the appearance of the report concerning Nisi KoEn the Resident wrote confidently: 'There does not appear to be any communist activity in this Residency: although there are some old PKI members in Kupang, there is no activity on their part that we know of'.²⁵ There were obviously some communists in Timor, but these would seem to have been very few.

A.M. Kiah was one person noted as being 'suspected of communist sympathies'. Kiah was the PDI representative sent to the 1947 SOBSI congress mentioned earlier. In his report on the congress, he spoke of the oppression of workers in Timor and of the legitimacy of the strike weapon. This kind of talk was alarming to the Dutch authorities, but they consoled themselves in the knowledge that most of the PDI leadership were against co-operation with SOBSI.²⁶ In fact, the PDI leaders were keen to project a moderate image, and at a public meeting in February 1948 the chairman, Benyamin Sahetapy Engel, went out of his way to counter assertions that the PDI was a left-oriented organization.²⁷ A 1948 government report on the trade unions of East Indonesia, which included Timor, noted that there were no obvious socialist or communist tendencies there (Drooglever and Schouten 1986:384).

The Dutch agreed at the very end of 1949 to leave Indonesia. It seems that

²⁴ A. Verhoef, 'Politiek verslag van de Resident van Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het tijdvak 1-15 December 1948', in Algemene Secretarie Archief No. 3260, 'Politieke en economische verslagen betreffende de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden, uitgebracht door de Resident in Kupang, 1948 jan-1949 sept', Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, hereafter referred to as ARA, Algemene Secretarie No. 3260.

²⁵ A. Verhoef, 'Politiek verslag van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden over de periode 1 t/m 15 September 1948', in ARA, Algemene Secretarie No. 3260.

²⁶ C.W. Schuller, 'Politiek verslag van den Resident van Timor en Onderhoorigheden over de maand Augustus 1947', in ARA, Algemene Secretarie No. 3259; A. Verhoef, 'Politiek verslag van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden tijdvak 2de helft Februari 1949', in ARA, Algemene Secretarie No. 3260.

²⁷ A.J. van Es, 'Politiek verslag over de eerste helft Februari 1948', in ARA, Algemene Secretarie No. 3260.

there was still little communist activity in the Timor region throughout the 1950s. Nevertheless, when such activity was discovered, the Indonesian authorities appear to have welcomed it as little as the Dutch had. In 1947 the latter had uncovered an opposition movement on the island of Adonara. They had gaoled the members of the *Kumpulan Indonesia Merdeka* (Independent Indonesia Association), but the Indonesians released them in 1950. These then formed the *Persaudaraan Kaum Tani Indonesia* (Brotherhood of Indonesian Farmers, PKTI) and as such, again using Adonara as a base, were involved in road-building and health programmes. The group then staged a revolt, and its leaders were back in gaol in the mid-1950s. At their trials, these leaders admitted that they were communists and that the letters PKTI really stood for *Partai Komunis Tjambang Indonesia* (Communist Party, Indonesian Branch).²⁸

The issue of the growing influence of communists in the Protestant Church in Timor was raised at the Church's 1958 General Assembly, but was not pursued.²⁹ It obviously caused some concern, for in the same year one Protestant preacher in Kupang had an article published which was strongly anti-PKI.³⁰ The PKI was just beginning to expand at the time; by the early 1960s its influence in West Timor had reached unprecedented proportions.

The 1960s: the communist explosion

The growth of the PKI's influence on the national scene in the early 1960s had been helped in no small part by President Soekarno, who had promoted the concept of *Nasakom* (*Nasionalisme Agama Komunisme*, Nationalism Religion Communism) as a guiding principle of the Indonesian nation. One of Soekarno's aims in doing so was to create a balance among the competing forces in Indonesia and to prevent any one of them, including the army, from gaining the upper hand (Legge 1977:161-2). The worsening economic situation of the early 1960s also favoured the PKI, as it offered help to poor farmers and campaigned energetically for land reform.

While many Church members in the Timor region looked askance at Soekarno's flirtation with the PKI, many others saw the Church's protector in him, as they recognized that he had been instrumental in putting a stop to the push for Indonesia to become a Muslim state. Some of the region's best-edu-

²⁸ C.W. Schuller, 'Politiek economisch verslag over de maand December 1947', in ARA, Algemene Secretarie No. 3260; Reksodihardjo 1960:35.

²⁹ NAA, A1838/280, 3038/2/2/2.

³⁰ L. Radja Haba, 1958, 'Keradjaan Selamat dalam Komunisme', *Berita GMIT* 3, see Brookes 1977:85.

cated people – lecturers at the regional university in Kupang and many schoolteachers – reportedly joined the PKI, while at the same time remaining members of the Gereja Masehi Injili Timor (Timor Evangelical Christian Church, GMIT). They were also some of the most vocal supporters of Nasakom, believing that what they were doing was supported by the President and that this was therefore the appropriate course of action in the national interest. In addition, many Protestant ministers in rural Timor were able to relate to PKI demands for land reform and social justice, as there was great poverty in the countryside and the GMIT itself had a very weak social welfare programme.

On the other hand, in the Belu region of West Timor, near the East Timor border, where the majority religion is Catholicism, the Church is said to have been less troubled by the PKI (Webb 1986:99-101). This may have been justified as far as PKI infiltration of the Church was concerned, but the party apparently managed to gain many adherents among the common people, and it was reported that in 1963 the PKI-affiliated Barisan Tani Indonesia (Indonesian Farmers' Front, BTI) already had over 16,000 members in the area (El Tari 1972:263).

While individual Church members were able to reconcile active involvement in the Church with involvement in the PKI at the same time, the Protestant Church hierarchy was aware that it was facing a big problem. It had noted the growing influence of the PKI in 1958, but acknowledged this as a serious matter at the June 1960 GMIT General Assembly because a number of ministers and Church elders had joined the party. A letter was then sent to all the members, warning them against communism and informing them that if they did not leave the party by 31 December 1960, they would lose their places on the Church Councils. Eventually one minister was dismissed and another was suspended for refusing to renounce communism.³¹

The head of the PKI for Timor and the surrounding islands, Thobias (As) Paulus Rissi, then paid a visit to a senior member of the GMIT Synod. At the meeting Rissi became agitated and launched into a series of rhetorical questions: 'Do you know who Soekarno is? Do you know what Nasakom is? Do you know that all who oppose Nasakom will be "run over"?' He then demanded that the GMIT should not bother the PKI, then in turn the PKI would not bother the GMIT.³² Rissi also vented his anger in a PKI newsletter widely distributed in Kupang, in which he attacked the Moderator of the GMIT and various non-communists in the local government. Another of his targets was the Methodist Reverend G.S. Dicker, who had lived in West

³¹ NAA, A1838/280, 3038/2/2/2.

³² Interview with former senior GMIT Synod member, name withheld by request, Kupang, 3 November 2000.

Timor since 1956. In one of his sermons, Dicker had been critical of the PKI, so he was now labelled as an 'imperialist meddler' who should be expelled.³³

While the PKI in Timor was critical of senior Church figures on a personal level, it did not discourage Church membership. As far as it was concerned, it was perfectly all right to be a member of the party and of the Church at the same time.³⁴ Far from trying to turn the people away from the Church, PKI members reportedly used its popularity to try and lure unsophisticated members into the party by telling them that the letters PKI stood for Partai Kristen Indonesia (Indonesian Protestant Party), whereas in fact this party used the abbreviation Parkindo (Brookes 1977:85).

The PKI became a force to be reckoned with in Timor. In some places PKI members were threatening to take over the congregation and church organization, and in a very few places anti-PKI elements had been forced out.³⁵ In many villages, the PKI and its associated organizations, such as the BTI, were practically in control, and the means used to sign up illiterate farmers were deceptive, to say the least. People were promised an end of taxation and of compulsory communal labour, and a motor vehicle for every family (Brookes 1977:84-5). Apart from the modern addition of a vehicle, the promises were basically the same as those made by Christian Pandy and Sarekat Rajat back in 1925. The parallels go even further, because in some places there was also a campaign against the local raja. Raja Amarasi, Victor Koroh, a nephew of the raja whom in the 1920s Pandy had been instrumental in having dismissed, was a particular target. Ironically, this was partly because he was a fairly enlightened ruler who tried to modernize his kingdom in areas such as education and trade. This made him a favourite with the government, which liked to use his kingdom as a showplace for visitors. Koroh's reforms threatened to breathe new life into the institution of the kingdom, and so the PKI retaliated with 'anti-feudal' propaganda (Cunningham 1962:26-8).

The real extent of PKI support in Timor is hard to estimate. As already indicated, many people were lured into joining the party and its associated organizations by false promises or misrepresentations of the party as a totally different organization (Partai Kristen Indonesia). Paul Webb (1986:100) has suggested the likelihood that many uneducated peasants joined the PKI simply because their minister or village teacher told them to. Yet even the ministers and teachers – some of the best educated people in the community – often had only a vague understanding of Marxist ideology and communism. Under these circumstances the researcher must be wary when faced with

³³ NAA, A1838/280, 3038/2/2/2.

³⁴ NAA, A1838/280, 3038/2/2/2.

³⁵ Cooley 1976:202; interview with former senior GMIT Synod member, name withheld by request, Kupang, 3 November 2000.

statements about the extent of PKI membership in Timor, as this does not necessarily reflect a total commitment to communist ideology as it is generally understood.³⁶ PKI infiltration of the Church should not be over-estimated either; it may be, as Webb states, that many of those who were members of both the PKI and the Church had some belief in the ideas of both institutions, without being deeply committed to either (Webb 1986:100). On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that the PKI members in Timor were any less sincere in their Christian beliefs than any other members of the Church. Many had been brought up in religious families. These included the PKI head As Rissi, whose own father was a minister.³⁷ Another example was Francesca Fanggidaej, the granddaughter of a Rotenese bible-translator, who was an activist in the PKI women's movement (Fox 1977:195). Finally, there is the testimony of the wife of the head of the Nunhila PKI branch in Kupang³⁸, who was killed in 1965, that she came from a very religious family, that her husband sang in the church choir, and that all the PKI members she knew were members of the Church. They were all Christians before they became communists. She did not know where the idea came from that communists did not believe in God.

There were many possible reasons why people joined communist organizations in West Timor in the 1960s. A good example is the case of the Nabuasa clan of Amanuban in Central Timor outlined by Andrew McWilliam (1999:135). At the time of the Dutch conquest, the Nabuasas had been struggling to maintain their autonomy vis-à-vis the Nope clan, but when the Dutch recognized the Nopes as the ruling clan in Amanuban, the Nabuasas were forced to submit. Some Nabuasa leaders apparently joined the PKI in the early 1960s in an attempt to reassert their clan's autonomy vis-à-vis the Nopes. Some of them may also have joined, however, in reaction to certain local Christians who were opposed to the traditional animistic practices still observed and supported by members of the Nabuasa clan. In both cases the actions of the clan leaders were self-defeating. Following the 1965 'coup' many senior Nabuasa figures were killed, and the stigma attaching to the survivors entailed that the chances of political autonomy for the clan were far

³⁶ The main offenders on this score are the many books and articles which appeared after the so-called 'Timor Revival', which was concurrent with the events surrounding the 'coup'. See, for example, Koch 1971:159, where he states without any qualification that '40,000 communists' converted to Christianity in Timor. The revival itself started in SoE a few days before the 'coup' in Jakarta and would seem to have been triggered by the great political and economic tensions in Timor at the time. The area suffering worst from crop failures was also the area most affected by the revival. There had been similar movements during the Japanese occupation. For more information, see Peters 1974; Brookes 1977; Fox 1980.

³⁷ Interview with Maria Patty-Noach, Kupang, 30 June 2000; Fox 1980:285.

³⁸ Interviews, name withheld, Kupang, 7 July 2000 and 4 November 2000.

lower than before. Meanwhile, the Soeharto regime's insistence that all Indonesian citizens should belong to one of the recognized major religions made it even more difficult to defend the preservation of traditional animist beliefs. The Nabuasa case also highlights another aspect of the PKI in West Timor in the 1960s, and that is that the party seemed to be all things to all people. In Amarasi the PKI was anti-feudal, but in Amanuban the Nabuasa clan looked to the PKI for help in re-establishing its traditional authority. The leaders of the Nabuasa clan also looked to the PKI for protection of their animist beliefs in the face of attacks by members of the Church, whilst elsewhere the PKI encouraged the notion that it was a 'Christian-friendly' organization.

Webb (1986:105-6) relates how on the predominantly Roman Catholic island of Flores the PKI managed to gain a foothold among poor farmers by promising land reforms, while, as in Timor, the people's understanding of the tenets of communism was virtually nil. He suggests that some of these people may have joined the PKI simply to bring some adventure and excitement into their otherwise dull and weary lives. Webb also relates the story of PKI members on the island of Solor, between Flores and Timor, declaring that after the PKI took over, it would dig out the mountain behind the town, exposing a waterfall and sacks of rice, which would provide food for all. After that a ship would arrive bringing more sacks of rice. As Webb points out, the poverty and uncertainty on Solor at the time were as great as anywhere else in the region, and this improvised 'cargo cult' must have brought some comfort to its adherents. That the PKI members of Solor also claimed to be good Catholics indicates that neither Christianity nor politics was capable of providing adequate answers in those troubled times.

A similar 'cargo cult' was started in Timor by Balthasar Klau, and it is this case which most clearly links the PKI with traditional magic and witchcraft in Timor. Simon Schaper was the local Roman Catholic priest in the area where Klau lived, on the south coast of the Belu region. He knew Klau well in the 1950s and 1960s and gives a detailed account of the development of his movement. The picture Schaper paints is that of an extremely ambitious man who manipulated traditional beliefs to entice gullible people to join the PKI. This may be correct, but it is possible that Klau and his followers had no difficulty in reconciling the indigenous animist religion with the ideology of the PKI. Klau undertook a number of actions to undermine the authority of the local rajas, in line with long-standing PKI practice on Timor, but it looks as if this may have been more out of spite as a result of Klau's failure to achieve his own ambition to become a raja. That Klau's association with the PKI may have been little more than opportunistic is suggested also by the fact that he was previously a member of both the Partai Katolik (Catholic Party) and the Partai Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian Nationalist Party) (Schaper 1974; 1984:38). Of course, Klau may have been in the PKI all along, membership of

the other parties being part of a long-term strategy. Without more information it is impossible to know.

Balthasar Klau was related to Raja Lakekun and claimed that the latter's position was rightfully his. He failed to win any support for his cause and then became active in campaigns against the traditional rights of the *raja*s, such as the right to a portion of the harvest. These rights were enshrined in the local *adat* (custom), which Klau always claimed to support. Klau's record of attendance at local *adat* ceremonies was poor, however, and he broke many local rules. Most of the *adat* authorities therefore ignored him, but he built up a following when he started working as a *makdok* – a traditional healer who claims to have access to the spirits of the ancestors. Klau was helped in his efforts as his house at Aubot was not far from Masin Lulik, the spot where it was believed the ancestors' spirits dwelled. Two female *makdok* joined Klau as his concubines, and he attracted other followers, who retailed amulets and magic formulas. Klau claimed that by means of a number of ceremonies he would accomplish a great feat and unite the spirit world with the world of the living. When this was achieved, there would no longer be any need for the people to work and they would be freed of all the restraints of *adat* and religion. The *adat* elders said that this was impossible, but this only made Klau seem even more powerful (Schaper 1974; 1984:17, 27-30).

One of Klau's great supporters was Willem Asa, a former schoolteacher who in 1962 became PKI Secretary for South Belu. Klau also had contacts with Edja, PKI Secretary of Atambua, and the local leader of the BTI, Fanus Pinai. Schaper views Klau's involvement with the PKI as being aimed at undermining all authority: that of the *adat* elders, the church and the government. This would then leave an empty shell for 'atheistic communism'. Schaper notes that in the area where Klau was active there was a marked decline in church attendance. In the meantime, however, Klau pushed on with his programme. In October 1964 he sacrificed a red buffalo, three red pigs and a red hen to 'drive away the devil' and prepare the ground for the final ceremony, which would take place in 1965. In that ceremony two large canoes, the *Ro Kukun* (Spirit Boat) and the *Ro Roman* (People's Boat), would sail down the river to sea with Klau on board. They would later return loaded with an abundance of useful goods and luxury articles (Schaper 1974; 1984:29-41).

In January 1965 Klau opened a savings bank and loan office, using the admission fees to pay for the preparations for the great final ceremony. He also signed up people for three co-operative organizations and had no shortage of applicants for this. He collected the fees and handed the new members a PKI membership card. The Roman Catholic bishop of Atambua became alarmed at the progress of this movement. Finding that neither Klau nor his communist supporters heeded his advice, he excommunicated them. His

action seems to have had no effect, and the people gathered at Aubot to rehearse the final ceremony, singing versions of Nasakom songs while they waited for the great day. The ceremony was never held, however. When news broke of the failed 'coup' in Jakarta, Klau disappeared. It later appeared that he had been executed, like scores of other PKI members from the area (Schaper 1984:30-2, 63; Webb 1986:102).

The fantastic promises of people like Balthasar Klau were made to entice some Timorese to become members of the PKI, while vague promises of material advantages or land played a role in attracting many of the rural poor. Specific promises were sometimes made to more sophisticated city people. Such was the case with Andreas Yohannes, who in the mid-1960s was head of the Department of Social Services in Kupang. Yohannes had a cousin who was a member of the PKI who, he says, approached him with the promise to recommend him for the position of Bupati (Regent) if he joined the party.³⁹ Yohannes rebuffed him and does not know what happened to him, except that he was taken to Java after 1965 and never returned. While Yohannes turned down the offer to join the PKI, other senior government figures in Kupang were alleged to have joined the party, such as the head of the Information Department.⁴⁰ The local army commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Soetarmadji, and the local head of the government radio station, R. Amir Tjiptoprawiro, were also said to be PKI members (*Gerakan* 1996:116).

Because of President Soekarno's propagation of the concept of Nasakom, the PKI won a degree of respectability. As early as the beginning of 1961, As Rissi was chosen as one of the three members representing the Timor region in the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (People's Consultative Assembly, MPR), and by 1965 there were fifteen members associated with the PKI in the local parliament.⁴¹ Other PKI members were in the army and in senior positions in government, as mentioned, and yet others were working as teachers or were associated with the church. The PKI had a number of affiliated organizations which attracted many members in Timor, including the trade union organization, SOBSI, the BTI for farmers, the women's group Gerwani, a students' group, and others. With so many people from all walks of life, including some very prominent figures, being associated with the PKI, the party seemed quite respectable. In the rural areas the PKI had attracted interest with its demands for land reform, but also with its offers of immediate practical help. For instance, when drought and crop failures in 1964 and 1965 resulted in widespread famine in West Timor, with food prices soaring and many families finding it almost impossible to get enough to eat, in many

³⁹ There are four Regencies in West Timor.

⁴⁰ Interview with Andreas Yohannes, SoE, 26 June 2000.

⁴¹ NAA, A1838/280, 3038/2/2/2; El Tari 1972:109; Doko 1975:5.

cases it was the PKI which brought relief in the form of food and money. Many people then joined the party out of gratitude.⁴² The PKI was of course not universally loved in Timor; many people were suspicious of it and often openly hostile to it. Although it had members, for example, in the army and the church, it had many more opponents in these two institutions. The PKI had a broad appeal in its aims of promoting social and economic equality. While this was welcomed by some of Timor's secular elite and many members of the army and church, it was rejected by others, who saw the PKI as a threat to their positions. To them the PKI was opportunistic, atheistic and anti-capitalist. Although Soekarno had tried with Nasakom to balance the forces competing for power in Indonesia, by late 1965 his authority was waning and he could not keep these forces under control. As a result, many people on Timor who had allied themselves with the PKI were left in a very vulnerable position.

30 September 1965: the end of the party

According to the Soeharto regime's version of events the PKI had planned a nation-wide slaughter of its opponents in the wake of the Jakarta 'coup'. This was to apply to Timor also, and in mid-September 1965 a PKI official was sent to Kupang to pass on the relevant instructions of the PKI Politburo. On 27 September As Rissi convened a meeting to establish a revolutionary council and to discuss the removal of government officials and religious leaders. The chairman of the council was to be Army Commander Soetarmadji. However, when the people learnt what had been happening in Jakarta and realized that the revolutionary council was being manipulated by the PKI, their anger could not be contained. They then gathered in Kupang in their thousands to call for the destruction of the '30 September Movement'. A new army chief was then appointed to restore peace and quiet (*Gerakan* 1996:91, 115-6).

One of the more remarkable features of this official version of events is that Timor is given so much attention. Many other areas are merely mentioned in passing or not at all. It may be that PKI activity was more intensive in Timor than in some of the other regions, but it is impossible to know for certain due to the dearth of information. For Timor itself there are a few fragmentary press accounts of events at the time and one or two mentions in other sources, but oral accounts are the main source. Though most of these have to be taken at face value, they can be checked one against the other, as well as with the small body of documentary evidence.

⁴² Interview with Maria Patty-Noach, Kupang, 30 June 2000; Webb 1986:100.

A useful document in this regard is the report written by Brigadier-General El Tari concerning the period 1968-72, when he was Governor of the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur.⁴³ El Tari (1972:32-3) also gives an account of events that occurred in Timor before he became Governor, when he was still a serving soldier. The report includes a photograph of General Achmad Yani with Lieutenant-Colonel Soetarmadji taken in Kupang on 28 September 1965 – just two days before Yani was killed in Jakarta in connection with the 'coup'. The caption states that there were plans for Yani to be killed by the PKI and that Soetarmadji was involved in the plot. This is a revelation! If Yani had been killed in Kupang before the 'coup' in Jakarta actually took place, this would surely have had an enormous influence on the course of events. El Tari gives no further details. It is said, however, that during his stay in Kupang, General Yani was followed around by As Rissi all the time, and later a rumour circulated that there had been an attempt to kill Yani with a poisoned apple. Concerning Soetarmadji's involvement, a senior member of the GMIT Synod of the time recalled that after the news of the 'coup' in Jakarta reached Kupang, a weeping Soetarmadji called him and other community leaders into his office, where he offered his apologies for all that had happened.⁴⁴ This man did not necessarily regard this as an admission of complicity, but one wonders what else it could have meant. On the other hand, this does not look like the behaviour of a man who had been planning to ruthlessly kill all the people he had invited to his office.

El Tari (1972:260-79) also gives a good picture of the political climate in Timor around the time of the 'coup'. The PKI had a newspaper, *Pelopor* (Pioneer), which he says it used to stir up the people against the government. The BTI and other PKI organizations across Timor were trying to do the same. In 1965 the streets of Kupang were covered with PKI posters with propaganda for Nasakom, proclaiming the need for 'revolutionary leaders' and land reform. On the other hand, everyone at the time was concerned with national issues, and a mass meeting in Kupang in April 1964 drew a crowd of 10,000 who all stated their wish to destroy the 'puppet state' of Malaysia. In 1965 there was another mass meeting in Kupang to support Soekarno's attendance at the Asia-Africa Conference, as well as an all-party conference on Nasakom. The PKI did not have a monopoly on political activity in Timor in 1965.

Whether or not the PKI had been planning any action in Timor at the time of the 'coup' is a question that remains difficult to answer. There is certainly

⁴³ The province of Nusa Tenggara Timur comprises West Timor, the islands of Flores and Sumba, and all the smaller islands in between. The provincial capital is Kupang.

⁴⁴ Interview with a former senior GMIT Synod member, name withheld by request, Kupang, 3 November 2000.

a widespread belief still today that they planned many killings. In the forest near the Central Timorese town of SoE the communists are supposed to have dug graves in which to bury the Bupati and other government officials. However, in the event it was they themselves who filled the graves. In Kupang allegedly 'black lists' were found of prominent church leaders and others who had opposed the PKI who were to have been liquidated. Their bodies were to have been disposed of in an open drain leading to sea. The communists had also dug graves for their victims in Kupang, but as in SoE, it turned out that they had dug their own graves.⁴⁵ And so it goes on. These simple stories sound apocryphal and self-justifying, but there are also some more detailed reports of planned PKI action. Dr Maria Patty-Noach recalled that there was an air-raid practice in Kupang just before the 'coup'. A number of Christian leaders and non-communist government officials were gathered together and taken out of town. Nothing happened and eventually they all returned home. The next day, however, they learnt of the 'coup' in Jakarta. Patty-Noach surmises that these people were to have been killed, but that for some reason the order never came through and they were released.⁴⁶ John Hughes (1967:142-3) recorded a similar story of non-communist officials and their spouses being gathered outside Kupang for a 'special briefing', but being returned unharmed when the local army units refused to align themselves with the communist plotters. The truth about these cases will probably never be known, but it would seem that most PKI members in Timor were as surprised to hear about the 'coup' in Jakarta as everybody else. Father Schaper (1984:61) knew of the events in Jakarta from reports on Radio Australia, but suspected that the local communist leaders in Belu knew nothing of what had been happening. They coolly carried on with their daily activities and continued to greet him casually, until they were captured by the military several days after the 'coup'. The wife of the head of the PKI's Nunhila branch recalled that her husband and his associates knew nothing about the 'coup' and were very surprised.⁴⁷

El Tari (1972:281, 284-7) reports that it took some time for the people of Timor to respond to the news of the 'coup', but that on 28 October 1965 there was some 'spontaneous action': the houses of As Rissi and other PKI leaders were pelted with stones; some PKI members were captured by local youths (although he does not say what they did with them); and all the signboards in Kupang with the initials PKI were pulled down. All this is said to have

⁴⁵ Interviews with Pae Nope, SoE, 26 June 2000; former senior GMIT Synod member, name withheld by request, Kupang, 3 November 2000; and Andreas Yohannes, SoE, 26 June 2000; Brookes 1977:85-6.

⁴⁶ Interview with Maria Patty-Noach, Kupang, 30 June 2000.

⁴⁷ Interviews, name withheld, Kupang, 7 July 2000 and 4 November 2000.

occurred 'without incident'. At mass meetings in Kupang on 20 November 1965 and again on 17 January 1966 ten thousand people reportedly declared their loyalty to Soekarno and 'the revolution', but demanded that the PKI and all its associated organizations be dissolved. The PKI is alleged to have 'voluntarily' disbanded itself already on 11 January 1966. El Tari admits that further action was also taken and, without going into detail, says that the PKI was 'wiped out', 'down to the village level', by the government and army with the help of the people.

Apparently the army and the police rounded up all known PKI members; the most prominent ones, such as Rissi and Soetarmadji, were taken away to Jakarta or Denpasar (most were never seen again, but Rissi is said by several sources to have returned to Kupang to live in the 1990s). A handful of PKI activists were formally arrested and gaoled.⁴⁸ Then the killings began. On Timor these were organized by the army, but the leaders of political parties and heads of government departments were ordered to be present, presumably in order to share in the guilt.⁴⁹ Many did not want to attend. Yohannes, for instance, recalled how he had delegated one of his staff to go in his place. When the man returned, the interior of the departmental vehicle was covered in blood. Asked what had happened, he replied that one PKI member had tried to escape while being transported to his death, and so he had been shot and his body loaded into the car. The vehicle was hastily cleaned up. Yohannes had heard that some of those shot had not yet been dead when they were buried.⁵⁰ Many of those killed were schoolteachers and low-level government officials.⁵¹ Some of the latter had no connections with the PKI apart from the fact that they had worn SOBSI badges or the like on the orders of their superiors at some time, photographs of which were produced as 'evidence' of their 'guilt'.⁵²

Some GMIT ministers were able to save lives by stepping in to counter false accusations being made to the army by opportunists trying to settle old scores.⁵³ There were also some ministers and many teachers from GMIT

⁴⁸ Interviews with Andreas Yohannes, SoE, 26 June 2000; Maria Patty-Noach, Kupang, 30 June 2000; name withheld, Kupang, 7 July and 4 November 2000; and Minggus Ratukore, Kupang, 7 July 2000.

⁴⁹ Interviews with Andreas Yohannes, SoE, 26 June 2000; and Maria Patty-Noach, Kupang, 30 June 2000. Seth S. King (1966) reports that an unnamed Western visitor to Kupang was invited to witness some of the executions as well, but was told that all who witnessed the killings must also take part in them.

⁵⁰ Interview with Andreas Yohannes, SoE, 26 June 2000.

⁵¹ Interviews with Maria Patty-Noach, Kupang, 30 June 2000; and name withheld, Kupang, 7 July and 4 November 2000.

⁵² Interview with Minggus Ratukore, Kupang, 7 July 2000.

⁵³ The 'old scores' that were thus settled would appear to have been mainly personal ones. There is no evidence that they were political in nature. Nor is there any evidence that grudge

schools who were arrested and interrogated as communist sympathizers. At least one minister, a few other church officials, and a number of teachers were killed (Cooley 1976:346-7; Brookes 1977:147). Webb (1986:112) was told that some Chinese who were killed as communist sympathizers in Timor were simply moneylenders who were removed with a view to clearing outstanding debts. The Chinese were clearly targeted, however, as the Pecinaan (Chinese quarter) which had existed in Kupang since the nineteenth century was completely destroyed. Temples and schools were closed, Chinese organizations were disbanded, and many of those who were not killed fled the city, never to return (Julianus and Harzufri 2001; El Tari 1972:289). There are said to be a number of mass graves around Kupang and numerous others elsewhere in Timor where victims were buried. An Australian businessman who visited Timor a few years after the killings was shown a spot outside Kupang by a government official where hundreds of suspected communists were said to lie buried (Wilson 1992:49). The official admitted that many innocent people had been killed along with the communists – a point generally agreed on in Timor today by those who are prepared to discuss the matter. All sources agree that the number of those who died must run at least in the hundreds, while some put the figure at 2,000 or higher.⁵⁴

The methods of dealing with PKI members seem to have varied from place to place. Fifteen PKI members who were adherents of the 'cargo cult' of Solor Island reportedly were taken to mainland Flores, where they were beaten by soldiers, and then handed back to the community for punishment. The villagers beheaded them and then sought out fifteen other local 'trouble-makers' and removed their heads also. These extra killings provoked reprisals by the police, and some of the culprits were imprisoned (Webb 1986:106-7). This seems to have been an exceptional case, however, for it was reported to have been usual in Timor for entire families of communists to be executed to reduce the chances of revenge (Sulzberger 1966). Schaper (1984:54-7, 63) reports that PKI activists from South Belu were interrogated by a team of three judges and then liquidated by the military. A very few were acquitted. Many were held for months before their cases were dealt with, and some went mad in the interim. At least one man committed suicide on receiving the message that he had to report to the judges. Sometimes the

killings by members of the public were used to deflect blame from the military, as the army is said to have carried out most of the killings on Timor, including those based on 'information received'. It is difficult to draw solid conclusions about these matters, however, due to the scant evidence.

⁵⁴ Cooley 1976:346-7; interviews with Andreas Yohannes, SoE, 26 June 2000; former senior GMT Synod member, name withheld by request, Kupang, 3 November 2000; Benyamin Sahetapy Engel, Kupang, 2 November 2000; name withheld, Kupang, 7 July and 4 November 2000; Minggus Ratukore, Kupang, 7 July 2000; and Maria Patty-Noach, Kupang, 30 June 2000.

prisoners were allowed to return home without an escort to collect food, but they rarely tried to escape, for if they did, one of their fellow prisoners was decapitated and their families were threatened. Later the military issued a summons for all remaining PKI members in South Belu to appear in the district capital Atambua. The wet season was already far advanced and a long caravan of people trudged to the town through the rain for a distance of over sixty kilometres. On arrival in Atambua they were led to the crossroads in the middle of the town, where on top of a big petrol drum sat the decapitated head of Balthasar Klau, the PKI *makdok* of South Belu. The long procession was guided around the drum and then without further ado allowed to start the long journey back home.

The South Belu PKI members may have been fortunate, as the killings in other places seem to have taken place on a much larger scale. In Kupang it was reportedly difficult for years to have basic repairs such as plumbing done, as all the tradesmen had been 'communists' killed in 1965 (Wilson 1992:52-3). The wife of the head of the PKI's Nunhila branch reported that her husband was held for a short while at the old Dutch gaol in Kupang before being taken to an unknown location to be killed and buried. All the members of his branch, thirty to forty people, suffered a similar fate. During the first few days of the killings, she said, an unnatural silence descended on Kupang and everyone avoided going out of their houses. She was heavily pregnant at the time and gave birth on 7 October. The very next day she was taken to the police station and, although interrogated for several days, steadfastly denied any personal involvement with the PKI. She was kept at the station for a long time with little food and no shelter. Exposed to the elements, her child became sickly and died soon after she was released. The release from detention was not the end of her ordeal, however: like probably thousands of others on Timor, she was kept under surveillance. She was sacked from her civil service job and told she would never be allowed to work for the government again. When years later she landed a job with a foreign company and was given an opportunity to travel abroad, she was refused travel documents.⁵⁵ There were many other cases in which relatives of PKI members were made to suffer and forced out of their jobs, or barred from getting a job. One of the best-known cases in Timor was that of the Marcus family. M. Marcus was a teacher and head of the BTI in SoE. His son Octo was also a teacher and a communist. Both were killed after the 'coup'. Another of Marcus' children was a highly respected staff member at the state university in Kupang and a known anti-communist. Nevertheless, when this Drs J.F. Marcus was appointed *rektor* (vice-chancellor) of the university, Jakarta would not ratify

⁵⁵ Interviews, name withheld, Kupang, 7 July 2000 and 4 November 2000.

the appointment because of the family's PKI connections.⁵⁶ Reprisals against those accused of PKI involvement continued into the 1970s and 1980s, with many civil servants being dismissed from their positions. The matter is still an issue today, and in mid-2000 it was reported that six teachers from Central Timor who were dismissed in 1983 were trying to have their case reviewed and to get re-appointed (Ans 2000).

As elsewhere in Indonesia, the killings in Timor were not confined to the period immediately after the 'coup', but continued throughout 1966 and well into 1967. The wife of the PKI leader cited above blamed 'fanatical Muslims' for many of these killings, which she said only stopped after repeated complaints by Parkindo that those being killed were not communists but Christians.⁵⁷ Webb (1986:105) reports that the 'fanatical Muslim' complaint was heard also on Flores and that the Timorese Archbishop of Ende forbade Catholics to participate in the killings even after being ordered by the local Javanese army commander to do so. Muslims in Timor had actually been involved with the PKI since the earliest days, but during the days after the 'coup' all manner of tensions came to the surface. It certainly appears that the killings were often far from 'spontaneous' and were carried out in accordance with an agenda set far away from the Timor area. This seems to be especially true with respect to the army's insistence that all those who did not belong to any of the recognized religions were atheists and therefore communists. In Timor in 1965 a large proportion of the population still adhered to the traditional animist religion. Many of those who realized the peril they were in rushed to join the church, but others were only saved by church officials answering, when questioned by the army about the names of local 'heathens', that there were none. Many areas thus went from 80% animist to 100% Christian overnight. The details of getting people formally into the church were to be worried about later. However, the result was that tens of thousands of people renewed their church membership or joined the church for the first time (Cooley 1976:203, 347; Brookes 1977:86).

Conclusion

The PKI was active in West Timor and the surrounding islands from the year of its inception until its dissolution in 1966. Throughout that period the party's operations were affected by local conditions. The majority religion in

⁵⁶ Interviews with Benyamin Sahetapy Engel, Kupang, 2 November 2000; Maria Patty-Noach, Kupang, 30 June 2000; and former senior GMT Synod member, name withheld by request, Kupang, 3 November 2000.

⁵⁷ Interviews, name withheld, Kupang, 7 July 2000 and 4 November 2000.

the Timor region is Christianity, and whether or not its members were also members of the church seems never to have been an issue for the party. The church was not equally supportive of co-membership of the PKI. Although the popularity of the church at times was cynically exploited by some PKI members to attract interest in their party, one cannot conclude that those PKI members and leaders in West Timor who claimed to be Christians were not sincere in their belief. In Timor indigenous animist beliefs and a strong belief in witchcraft, traditional magic and the supernatural also affected the way the PKI conducted itself in the region. Dutch sources from as early as 1926 mention communist activists in the region who were also retailers of amulets and charms, which they sometimes sold to fraudulently enlist people in communist organizations. In 1965 the *makdok* movement of Balthasar Klau acted in a similar way. As in the case of the Christians, however, there is no basis for assuming that all animists were incapable of understanding politics – many of them were probably conscious supporters of the PKI. Throughout the period the PKI was involved in more conventional radical political actions as well. Its members regularly challenged the traditional authority of the rajas and of the government. In its actions the party scored many successes, perhaps the greatest of which was its appeal to a wide variety of people in the Timor region and its ability to convince them that the PKI could respond to their special needs. Muslims, Christians, animists, university lecturers and illiterate farmers all looked to the PKI for the fulfilment of their aspirations and all shared in the tragedy of the party's bloody defeat.

ABBREVIATIONS

ARA	Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague.
BTI	Barisan Tani Indonesia, Indonesian Farmers' Front.
CPA	Communist Party of Australia.
GMIT	Gereja Masehi Injili Timor, Timor Evangelical Christian Church.
MPR	Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, People's Consultative Assembly.
NAA	National Archives of Australia.
Nasakom	Nasionalisme Agama Komunisme, Nationalism Religion Communism.
Parkindo	Partai Kristen Indonesia, Indonesian Protestant Party.
PDI	Persatoean Demokrasi Indonesia, Indonesian Democratic Union.
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party.
PKTI	Persaudaraan Kaum Tani Indonesia, Brotherhood of Indonesian Farmers.
SEAC	South East Asia Command.
SKBI	Serikat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia, Indonesian Labour Union.
SOBSI	Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia, All-Indonesia Central Labour Organization.

REFERENCES

- Ans, 2000, 'Nope tak Berwenang Cabut SK Pemecatan 6 Oknum Guru SD "PKI"', *Pos Kupang*, 23 June.
- Bosch, J.J., 1935, 'Politiek verslag van Timor en Onderhoorigheden over het 1e halfjaar 1935', in *Politieke Verslagen*.
- Brookes, G.F., 1977, 'Spirit Movements in Timor; A Survey'. [MTh thesis, Melbourne College of Divinity.]
- Cooley, F.L., 1976, *Benih yang Tumbuh XI; Memperkenalkan Gereja Masehi Injili Timor*, Jakarta: Lembaga Penelitian dan Studi, Dewan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia.
- Cribb, R., 1990, 'Problems in the Historiography of the Killings in Indonesia', in: R. Cribb (ed.), *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1967; Studies from Java and Bali*, pp. 1-43, Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University.
- Cunningham, C.E., 1962, *People of the Dry Land; A Study of the Social Organisation of an Indonesian People*. [PhD thesis, Oxford University.]
- Doko, I.H., 1975, *Nusa Tenggara Timur dalam Kancah Perjuangan Kemerdekaan Indonesia*, Bandung: Masa Baru.
- Drooglever, P.J., and M.J.B. Schouten (eds), 1986, *Officiële bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen 1945-1950*, Vol. 13, 's-Gravenhage: Nijhoff.
- El Tari, 1972, *Memori Gubernur Kepala Daerah Propinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur Tahun 1958-1972*, Vol. 1, Kupang: n.n.
- Fox, J.J., 1977, *Harvest of the Palm; Ecological Change in Eastern Indonesia*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- , 1980, 'Movement of the Spirit', in: J.J. Fox (ed.), *Indonesia; The Making of a Culture*, pp. 235-46, Canberra: Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.
- Gerakan, 1996, *Gerakan 30 September; Pemberontakan Partai Komunis Indonesia; Latar Belakang, Aksi dan Penumpasannya*, Jakarta: Departemen Penerangan.
- Hobsbawm, E.J., 1965, *Primitive Rebels; Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, New York: Norton Library.
- Hudson, W.J., and W. May (eds), 1989, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49*, Vol. 8, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Hughes, J., 1967, *Indonesian Upheaval*, New York: McKay.
- Ileto, R.C., 1989, *Pasyon and Revolution; Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Julianus, A., and E. Harzufri, 2001, 'Pecinaan Kupang "Doeloe" dan Sekarang', *Pos Kupang*, 4 February.
- Kartodirdjo, S., 1978, *Protest Movements in Rural Java*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- King, S.S., 1966, 'The Great Purge in Indonesia', *The New York Times Magazine*, 8 May.
- Koch, K., 1971, *Revival in Indonesia*, Grand Rapids: Kregel.
- Legge, J.D., 1977, *Indonesia*, Sydney: Prentice Hall.
- Lev, D., 1973, *Bush Lawyers in Indonesia; Stratification, Representation and Brokerage*, Berkeley: University of California.
- Lockwood, R., 1975, *Black Armada*, Sydney: Australasian Book Society.
- McDonald, H., 1981, *Suharto's Indonesia*, n.p.: Fontana.
- McVey, R., 1968, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- McWilliam, A., 1999, 'From Lord of the Earth to Village Head; Adapting to the Nation-State in West Timor', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* 155:121-44.
- Memories, n.d., *Memories van overgave; Collecties van het Ministerie van Koloniën*, Lisse, The Netherlands: MMF Publications. [Microfiche version.]
- Peters, G., 1974, *Indonesian Revival; Focus on Timor*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Politieke Verslagen, n.d., *Politieke Verslagen en berichten uit de Buitengewesten van Nederlands Oost-Indië, 1898-1940*, Lisse, The Netherlands: MMF Publications. [Microfiche version.]
- Republik, 1953, *Republik Indonesia; Sunda Ketjil*, Jakarta: Kementrian Penerangan.
- Reksodihardjo, S., 1960, *Report on the Lesser Sunda, Indonesia, 1952-57; Memori Penjerahan Gubernur, Kepala Daerah Propinsi Nusa Tenggara*, New York: CCM Information Corporation. [US Government translation.]
- Ricklefs, M.C., 1990, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, London: Macmillan.
- Schaper, S., 1974, 'Gerakan Ekonomis yang Jadi Subversip', in: M.P.M. Muskens and Cornelissen (eds), *Sejarah Gereja Katolik*, Vol. 3b, pp. 1323-6, Jakarta: Bagian Dokumentasi Penerangan, Kantor Waligereja Indonesia.
- , 1984, 'Het schimmenrijk der matebian's (de geesten van de voorvaderen van de Belunezen op Zuid Timor); Een episode van 1950-1965'. [Unpublished manuscript.]
- Schultz, C., 1925, 'Politiek overzicht over het jaar 1924 van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden', in *Politieke Verslagen*.
- , 1926, 'Politiek overzicht over het jaar 1925 van de Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden', in *Politieke Verslagen*.
- , 1927, 'Memorie van overgave van den afgetreden Resident van Timor en Onderhoorigheden', in *Memories*.
- Scott, P.D., 1985, 'The United States and the Overthrow of Sukarno, 1965-1967', *Pacific Affairs* 58:239-64.
- Sejarah, 1979, *Sejarah Kebangkitan Nasional Daerah Nusa Tenggara Timur*, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka.
- Sulzberger, C.L., 1966, 'Vicious Killings Continue in Indonesia', *Canberra Times*, 14 April.
- Wal, S.L. van der (ed.), 1974, *Officiële bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen 1945-1950*, Vol. 4, 's-Gravenhage: Nijhoff.
- Wal, S.L. van der, P.J. Drooglever, and M.J.B. Schouten (eds), 1981, *Officiële bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen 1945-1950*, Vol. 9, 's-Gravenhage: Nijhoff.
- Webb, R.A.F. Paul, 1986, 'The Sickle and the Cross; Christians and Communists in Bali, Flores, Sumba and Timor, 1965-67', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17:94-112.
- Widiyatmika, M., Sukendro, and N. Suroto, 1978, *Sejarah Daerah Tematis Zaman Kebangkitan Nasional di Daerah Nusa Tenggara Timur (1900-1942)*, Kupang: Biro Penelitian, Universitas Nusa Cendana.
- Wilson, A., edited by G. Pike, 1992, *Travelling through Timor*, Mareeba: Pinevale.